

large something he had warned us to expect.

We continued cruising, swimming over boulders, enjoying the coral formations, looking toward the exit point. We had both passed the last boulder before the exit when, not more than 5 feet in front of our faces, this THING lifted off the bottom of the ocean floor: 10½ to 11 feet of full-grown bull shark. It looked mammoth, majestic, glorious. We had startled the old boy; we had awakened him from his slumber, invaded his space.

He (I'm just assuming gender here — I didn't check for claspers on the pelvic fins) began to thrash violently. Finally he attained forward propulsion and swam out of the tunnel, but he didn't leave. He circled out in the light. All I could think of was *Jaws*. My buddy and I stayed behind the boulder, watching as this submarine of a shark, with a body cavity as big as a 55-gallon drum, a 2½-foot dorsal fin, and black eyes, came swimming right back at us.

I began, "Dear heavenly Father. . . ." But just in case, my buddy and I slid down behind the big boulder, got on our backs, and waited for the big fish to slide right over us. Instead of swimming into the cave, the shark made a sharp 180-degree turn to the right and swam off into the blue mist.

It took me a minute to gather my wits before the old refrain, TIME-AIR-TIME-AIR-TIME-AIR, hit me. I looked at my computer and my buddy looked at his. I was down to 970 pounds of air. My U.S. Divers Monitor II was beeping, flashing, and doing everything it could to get my attention.

We hit the exit point of the cave to find our divemaster waiting for us. He had seen the giant emerge from his vantage point above the exit and had taken up residence behind another boulder.

On our way up, at about 100 feet, it occurred to me that I couldn't say exactly where the massive bull shark had gone. I remembered their reputation as curious rascals who often come back for a closer look. I began doing 360 turns all the way up. By the time I had corkscrewed my way to the surface, I had 230 pounds of air left. My buddy had a little more, but his eyes were abso-

lutely bloodshot. He claimed mask squeeze, but we both knew it was from high blood pressure!

I already knew it was a special privilege to be a diver and have all the beauty of the ocean available for personal viewing, but this experience was one in a million. I have a difficult time believing that a creature so magnificent could be destroyed just for a bowl of soup.

— Louie Carrillo
Ft. Lauderdale, FL



Backtalk on Tonga Other Readers Beg to Differ

Tonga is an interesting place: the only South Pacific country that was never colonized by a European power. Most Tongans do, however, speak some English. It's not exactly on the beaten dive path, but it appears from our correspondence that Tonga could be heating up. Chip Popugh, of Trooper, Pennsylvania, sent us a report on his bad experience in Tonga, complete with half-empty tanks, being dropped downcurrent from the dive site, and having some dives cut so short that he was ordered out of the water with 2,000 psi left. Following are reactions from other recent visitors to Tonga.

Dear Editor:

This letter is presented as partial counterpoint to that of Chip Popugh, with respect to the problems he encountered

with Dolphin Pacific Divers in Vava'u, Tonga (July 1994 issue).

We recently (June–July '94) completed a bareboat (sail-it-yourself) charter with the Moorings in Vava'u. In contrast to Chip's tank rental experience with Dolphin Pacific, we had no such problems. However, the single 80s that seemed an initial bargain at 10 pa'anga (about \$8.00 U.S.) per day, became less so when we discovered that this was assessed every 24-hour period until the tanks are returned, which is often difficult logistically due to the location of the Dolphin Pacific facility within the sailing area.

We also did one 2-tank rendezvous dive with Dolphin Pacific, and although their boat was somewhat spartan, we were

treated with courtesy and respect commensurate with our dive experience. We were not shepherded around, and were allowed to dive until we reached 500 psi. However, upon surfacing after the second dive (within 20–30 feet of the near-vertical wall of the island off which we were diving), we discovered the boat drifting about a mile or so away. Grant, the dive leader/operator, speculated that the Tongan boat driver had gone to sleep! We waited in the calm water for about 30 minutes after signal mirror, whistle, and sausage all failed to get the apparently slumbering Tongan's attention. He finally returned and picked us up, with no harm done other than our inconvenience.

Your readers also might be interested to know that Dolphin Pacific is not the only game in town, and that a much better deal on tanks can be had at Vava'u Water Sports, which is little more than a shack, within 100 feet of the Moorings base in Neiafu (Vava'u). We discovered this halfway through our trip, when we rented ten 80s from them at \$6.00 (U.S.) each for the first 24 hours and \$2.00 every 24 hours thereafter until returned. All tanks had at least 2,950 psi, and although one had a bad O-ring, we were not charged for that tank and were able to negotiate a 50% break on two tanks we didn't use.

By the way, although the water was a bit chilly at 70–72°F (it's their winter this time of year), the diving and snorkeling were spectacular, with average 80–100 feet visibility, and flourishing, healthy reefs showing some of the greatest variety of coral (hard and soft) and reef fish that I've ever seen. We saw no pelagics of significance, though, despite the fact that most of our dives included walls ranging from 60

degrees to vertical, and most dropped to a bottom of 200–300 feet. — Bob Kenton, Reno, NV

Dear Editor,

Over a 2-week period in Tonga in April 1994, diving from our

Moorings charter sailboat, we did 10 guided dives with Dolphin Pacific and rented tanks for two nights of diving on our own. After that trip, I would not hesitate to recommend Patty Vogon and Grant Harris of Dolphin Pacific to any diver.

Silicone No-no's

Oceanic sends its dealers a newsletter about parts and service that recently contained some information that may be useful if your mustache causes your mask to leak or you use silicone lubricants for O-rings or other gear.

While the diving industry could scarcely do without silicone lubricants, they are very commonly used in the wrong form and in the wrong places.

At best, the silicone that comes out of any aerosol spray can is nearly useless for lubrication or as a dressing. It lacks the viscosity needed to provide any lasting lubrication or protection of rubber.

At worst, the harmful propellants that are used in most spray silicones cause serious stress cracking and other damage to the plastics used for regulators, gauge lenses, and housings, even Diver Propulsion Vehicle housings. As recently as 10 years ago, brass was commonly used for many parts that are now made from plastic. While using a spray didn't do those products any particular good, it didn't do the obvious harm that it can now.

If you are only trying to squeeze gauges into reluctant console

boots or hoses, use silicone milk that comes in a *pump* spray container.

For lubricating O-rings and springs, there is no substitute for silicone grease (except the expensive lubricants used for oxygen- and enriched air-compatible equipment). Silicone parts, such as diaphragms and other components, *do not* require lubrication; in fact, silicone grease should *never* be applied to them. If you can remember when neoprene rubber was state of the art for mask flanges, fins, etc., you have probably been told a thousand times *never* to bring petroleum jelly (Vaseline) into contact with them, because petroleum-based Vaseline will dissolve another petroleum-based product, such as neoprene rubber. The principle is exactly the same with silicone-based materials.

If you have a silicone-rubber mask that won't seal over a mustache, *do not* use silicone grease to help it seal. If it's necessary to put some kind of goop on your mustache (yuck), use petroleum jelly. Surprised? While it doesn't preserve it, petroleum jelly has no serious effect on silicone rubber, although discoloration will eventually result.

Tongan diving is, in general, drift diving. There are few dive spots that are anchorable. This requires use of a dive boat, something we were not accustomed to. After all, we had our own boat. Nevertheless, we discovered that the pre-trip claims were true. Our night dives, done by dinghy from our sailboat with rented tanks, were good but not fantastic.

We made contact with Dolphin Pacific from home via fax before our trip and negotiated a discount for five divers doing five 2-tank dives. When we arrived, we contacted Dolphin Pacific easily over the radio and they agreeably met us the next morning for a dive. We hopped on their motor boat, had a speedy (20- to 40-minute ride) to the site, and did two dives.

On each dive, one staff member stayed with the boat and the other went down with us. Of our party, two were older and appreciated the services of Dolphin Pacific's guide; the other three of us took off on our own. During the 2-week period, this schedule worked well. Dolphin Pacific kept us informed of their other commitments and we were able to dive, more or less, any place and at any time we wanted.

Our bottom times were good, mostly in the 70- to 90-minute range, with dive depths ranging from 50 to 122 feet. Although the staff had to sit in the hot sun while we drained the filled-to-3,200-psi tanks below, the only comments were good-natured joking.

When currents were present, we simply dove with the current and popped up when air ran low. In each case, the Dolphin Pacific boat had been watching our bubbles and jetted a hundred yards or so to pick us up. We felt safe in their hands and if they

kept the best dive sites secret, we never knew it. To give you an idea of the diving, here are some comments from our log:

Sea Fans at Tu'ungasika, water temp 79–80F, entered with Mo of Dolphin Pacific and took a guided tour. Through the sea fans and a cave to Nitrogen Narcosis Valley, a beautiful wall filled with live corals and lots of fish. Skipjack tuna, a sea snake, piles and piles of coronetfish, as well as the usual assortment of brightly colored smaller species. After the valley, we went over to a coral head and looked for Clownfish Heaven. Hundreds (or is it thousands?) of clownfish, each defending its own one square foot of anemone. This dive has a dangerous current and must be timed correctly.

Swallow's Cave, water temp 77–81F, thermocline at 35–40 feet,

the first we found in Tonga. A spotted eagle ray greeted us as we entered the water. Generally an OK site. A whole school of pyramid butterflyfish was hanging out on the reef. A few large rock cod fish were floating around, looking very much like dinner. Dwarf lionfish, lots of giant clams, and colorful crinoids. One Maori giant wrasse, about 60–80 lb., hung around at the limits of our vision.

I am at a loss to explain Mr. Popugh's poor experience with Dolphin Pacific. Our rental tanks were always over-full, our dives were always with the current, our times were never artificially limited by the staff. I hope other divers who may have shared the wonderful waters of Tonga can offer some comparison. — Joel Snyder, Tucson, AZ

You Did Say I Won, Right? To Have and Have Not

Dear *In Depth*:

I recently attended Our World Underwater in Chicago and registered to win a free dive vacation at the Coral Regency Resort in Bonaire. I was delighted to learn that I had won. When I called the 800 number printed on the certificate of confirmation that I received in the mail, I was told by someone named Jane that the resort was filled, but I would receive free lodging at a condo and she would call back with the details. She didn't. When I called the 800 number again it was no longer in service.

Should I unpack my dive bags? — Ted Gottfried, Williamsville, IL

The 800 number of Resort Connections, 78 North Street, Suite 1-5, Hyannis, Massachusetts, was indeed no longer in service. However, Coral Regency Resort does have another stateside number (800-721-2995). When I called this number and asked about your problem, I was told that too many people had won and the resort was filled. When I mentioned that you had not only been notified but also had received confirmation, yet were still unable to verify any substitutions, I was given the number of the